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ABSTRACT

Although there are many typologies of relationship development and love, it is frequently assumed that all break-ups are alike. This longitudinal study examined persons' cognitions regarding early relationship interactions and/or observations which caused them to think about the viability of the relationship. The role of causal attributions in the dissolution of casual-dating relationships was explored and led to the development of the typology of casual-dating dissolution. This study was part of a longitudinal investigation of dating relationships undertaken at the University of Oklahoma (1982-83). Of the 88 relationships originally in the study, 74 were dissolved during the 6-month collection period. Subjects were 48 participants who completed termination questionnaires. Results of the study led to the examination of a typology of casual-dating dissolution. This examination was guided by Kelley's (1979) theory of interdependence, and resulted in the discovery of three distinct types: independence break-ups, disposition break-ups, and relationship problem break-ups. These types were validated with information provided at intake (when the relationship was intact) and with information regarding the encounters between the subjects and their partners. The inclusion of types of break-ups in the study clarified an important question regarding alternatives in casual-dating stability: persons in disposition break-ups had a significantly lower assessment of their alternatives to the relationship. (ABL)

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Casual Dating Dissolution: A Typology

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Abstract

An examination of the role of causal attributions in the dissolution of 48 casual-dating relationships led to the development of a typology of casual-dating dissolution. This examination was guided by Kelley's (1979) theory of interdependence, and resulted in the discovery of three distinct types of break-up. Independence break-ups are those in which dating is perceived to be costly if it is more than casual. Disposition break-ups occur when persons who are not opposed to committed-dating per se, find specific dispositions (e.g., moody, conceited) of their partners undesirable. In Relationship Problem break-ups the quality or nature of the relationship is the focus, and a concern for both own and others' outcomes is present. These types are validated with information provided at intake (when the relationship was intact) and with information regarding the encounters between they and their partners. The inclusion of types of break-up in this investigation has clarified an important question regarding alternatives in casual-dating stability: Persons in Disposition break-ups have a significantly lower assessment of their alternatives to the relationship.

Casual Dating Dissolution: A Typology

Introduction

Although there are many typologies of relationship development and love (Cf., Hendrick & Hendrick, 1989), it is frequently assumed that all break-ups are alike (Duck, 1982). The focus of this research is on persons' cognitions regarding early relationship interactions and/or observations which caused them to think about the viability of the relationship. The role of causal attributions in the dissolution of casual-dating relationships was explored and led to the development of the typology of casual-dating dissolution.

Method for Developing the Typology

Sample. Eighty-eight college students from the University of Oklahoma agreed to participate in a longitudinal investigation of dating relationships during the 1982-1983 school year. Of the 88 relationships which were initially represented, 74 were dissolved during the six-month data collection period. Forty-eight of these persons (32 women and 16 men) completed termination questionnaires and were included in this study. Most (87%) of the respondents were 21 years old or younger and reported an academic major in the professions (e.g., business, engineering, social sciences). The mean annual parental income was between \$30,000 and \$39,000, the average

respondent's father had completed college, and most fathers worked in executive- or professional-status occupations.

Procedure. This study is part of a larger investigation of casual dating which utilized a longitudinal-sequential design with four primary data collection times. Following recruitment, volunteers completed an intake questionnaire. Questions included the degree to which individuals liked their partners, how satisfied they were with the benefits they got out of the relationship (CL), the degree to which they judged alternatives to the relationship to be available (CLalt), and the degree to which the participants were interested in being married.

For the next two weeks, encounter cards (similar to Wheeler and Nezlak's (1977) interaction records) were completed each time the participant interacted with the target partner for more than 10 minutes. If there was more than one encounter during any particular day, participants were instructed to complete an encounter report card for that encounter deemed most important. Questions included the length of time the encounter lasted, where the persons were at the time of the encounter and the nature of the activity, and the perceived physical intimacy and satisfaction with the encounter.

If a relationship dissolved at any point in the investigation, individuals were requested to complete a

Relationship Termination questionnaire. Questions included the length of time (in months) that the couple had dated and respondents' ideas about what led to the dissolution of the relationship. They were also asked about their desire to date their partners again and their partners' desire to date them again. Finally, respondents were asked to compare their relationship to one which might have lasted.

Developing the Typology. Data from 48 relationship terminations were examined for common themes or patterns of break-up. Kelley's (1979) theory of interdependence guided the examination, providing a basic framework of the information persons might use to evaluate a relationship. The following theoretical constructs from Kelley were of particular interest: unilateral dependence (one partner is more involved in the relationship than is the other partner); commonality of interest (whether the partners have similar wants and needs); pattern responsiveness (whether individuals try to maximize their own outcomes regardless of the consequences for the partner, or take the other's outcomes into consideration); interpersonal dispositions (attributions about the partners characteristics and feelings, for example, respect, love, and dominance); desire for a unique relationship; and conflict about conflict behavior (such as influence attempts and nagging). None of the explanations for break-up included all of these constructs.

First, all of the responses to the questionnaires were read and re-read until familiarity with each reason for break-up was established. Individual explanations were identified and recorded on a chart so that they could be compared and contrasted. Kelley's theory of interdependence (1979) was then applied to the data. For example, situations where people had the opportunity to choose between increasing their partners' rewards or maximizing their own rewards at the expense of their partners' were grouped together on a new chart (for example, "I needed a ride home but he was having a good time and didn't want to leave" was grouped with "When we go to the movies we always see what she wants to see"). After Kelley's model had been applied to all of the explanations, the questionnaires were stacked in Q-sort fashion; that is, in separate piles according to the type and number of constructs represented in the explanation.

Three primary sets of reasons were given, although some respondents gave reasons which fit into more than one group. Rules for inclusion into thematic categories were devised such that the set of characteristics shared by other persons with similar accounts were identified. Next, the explanations that fit into more than one category were examined for a dominant theme. Finally, three mutually exclusive types of break-up were defined: Interdependence, Disposition, and Relationship Problem.

Results

Typology of Break-ups

Independence Break-ups. Independence break-ups are those in which dating is perceived to be costly if it is more than casual. Persons reporting independence break-ups cite alternatives to the relationship (e.g., having no relationship) as a cause of dissolution. For example, one person in an Independence break-up reported that her partner "wanted to remain 'unattached' since he will be graduating and commissioned in May."

Disposition break-ups. Disposition break-ups occur when persons who are not opposed to committed-dating relationships per se, find specific dispositions (e.g., moody, conceited) of their partners undesirable. Information about the partners' dispositions is revealed via a series of small inconveniences, a specific event, or conflicting long-term goals. Important here is the perception that persons would not change their behavior to enhance their partners' outcomes. For example, one respondent said that she "couldn't spend time with a competitor," and another said that her partner was "irresponsible and rude."

Relationship Problem break-ups. In Relationship problem break-ups the quality or nature of the relationship is the focus, and a concern for both own and others' outcomes is present. Differences in macrolevel variables

(e.g., SES or religiosity) and specific conflicts of interest are reported as problematic. For example, one respondent said that "(if we) could meet on certain areas, I think the areas we already meet on are important." (See Table 1.)

Validity of the Typology

Factors external to the relationship. There were no differences between women and men in the types of break-ups that were experienced. Types of break-up were also not differentiated in terms of the respondents' reports of their desire to be married or their year in school. Persons in Relationship Break-ups are, however, significantly older ($M = 21$) than are persons in Independence break-ups ($M = 19$) and Relationship Problem break-ups ($M = 20$) ($F(1) = 4.52, p = .03$), and persons in Disposition break-ups perceive that they have fewer alternatives to the current relationship (CLalt) than do persons in Independence Break-ups or Relationship Problems break-ups ($F(1) = 5.03, p = .03$).

Factors internal to the relationship. The three break-up types are not different in the initial reports of liking for one's partner. There are significant differences, however, across the break-up types in preference for future dating ($\chi^2(6, N = 48) = 13.06, p < .05$). The greatest deviation between obtained and expected frequency was the number of persons who indicated that both they and their partner would like to date again in the future, located in

Relationship Problem break-ups (36%). Next, Disposition break-ups have more reports of neither they nor their partners wanting to date again in the future (36%), and there were more reports of future dating being dependent on conditions (e.g., that the dating not be so serious) in the Independence break-ups (30%).

Encounters. The encounters for persons in Independence break-ups are significantly longer than those of persons in Relationship Problem break-ups or Dispositional break-ups ($F(2,149)=3.63$, $p = .02$). There was no difference in the reported satisfaction with the encounter between Independence, Disposition, and Relationship Problem break-ups, but persons in Independence reported a significantly higher level of physical intimacy during their encounters than did persons in Dispositional break-ups ($t(134) = -.43$, $p = .01$).

Persons in Dispositional break-ups were significantly more likely to engage in activity in places other than a residence or leisure setting, while Relationship problem persons were significantly more likely to be together at a residence ($\chi^2(4, N = 214) = 20.75$, $p < .01$). The specific activity engaged in did not differ among the types.

Contributions of the Typology

The three types of break-up serve as a test of Kelley's theory. First, they affirm his prediction that individuals at early stages of relationship involvement are concerned

with outcomes. Independence and Disposition break-ups reflect Kelley's (1979) assertion that early in relationships persons are concerned with maximizing their own outcomes by varying their own behavior. Relationship Problem break-ups reflect concern for both own and partner's outcomes. Kelley (1979) explained that concern for both partners' outcomes indicates interdependence. Using Levinger and Snoek's (1972) model, Relationship Problem break-ups occurred in persons who seemed to have progressed beyond casual-dating while persons in Independence and Disposition break-ups seemed to have made earlier decisions to terminate the relationship. Second, Kelley's emphasis on the importance of the perception that one's partner's behavior is changed for one's self is affirmed. In Dispositional break-ups, persons learned of their partners' negative characteristics through the failure of the partners to maximize the individuals' outcomes at critical points in the relationships. In Relationship Problem break-ups persons indicated that they were unable to find a pattern of interaction such that each persons was adequately rewarded. This indicates that the participants tried to make the relationship work but could not.

This investigation has furthered the study of casual-dating dissolution by showing that there is more than one type of casual-dating break-up. Prior to this investigation, distinctions across unstable dating

relationships had not been made (e.g., Berg & McQuinn, 1986). Here it is shown that there are three distinct types of instability within the casual-dating stage and one important question about the role of alternatives in casual-dating stability has been clarified: Persons in Disposition break-ups have a significantly lower assessment of their alternatives to the relationship. Future research may pursue this question of alternatives among types of dating break-up, as well as whether certain types of break-up are more common at different stages of dating and whether an individual's personality type is related to the type of break-up experienced. As suggested by Zvonkovic (1987), establishing ways of predicting the type of dissolution experienced would enhance the success of relationship intervention. Intervention strategies would vary according to the specific problems of each type of dissolution.

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A synthesis of three types of Casual-Dating Break-up

	TYPES OF BREAK-UPS		
	Independence	Disposition	Relationship Problems
% of Break-ups accounted for	54.2	22.9	22.9
Whose relationship outcomes matter?	Respondent's	Respondent's	Respondent's and Partner's
Major contributor to break-up	Rejects notion of committed dating	Dislikes partner's characteristics	Domains of behavior not mutually accommodating
Key indicators of Break-up type	*Relationship is low priority	*O bothers P	*Conflict of interest in SES, religiosity
	*Unequal involvement	*P predicts future costs	*Differences in interpersonal preferences
	*Alternatives to relationship		